MY LADY ROTHA.

A ROMANCE.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

A SUDDEN EXPEDITION.

I did not after that suffer the grass to grow under my feet. I went out, and with my own eyes searched the fields at the back, and every ditch and water hole. I had the loss cried in the camp; my lady, on her return, offered a reward; we sent even to the nearer village, we patrolled the roads, we omitted nothing that could by any chance avail us. Yet, evening fell, and night, and found us still searching; no nearer, as far as we could see, to success. The child was gone mysteriously. Left to play alone for two minutes in the stillness of the afternoon, he had vanished as completely as if the earth had opened and swallowed him.

Baffled, we began to ask, while Marie sat pale and brooding in a corner, or now and again stole to the door to listen, who could have taken him and with what motive? There were men and women in the camp capable of anything. It seemed probable that some of these had stolen the child for the sake of his clothes. Others suggested witchcraft. But in my own mind I leaned to neither of these theories. I suspected, though I dared not utter the thought, that the General had done it. Without knowing how much of the story Count Hugo had confided to him, I took it as certain that the father had said enough to apprise him of the boy's value. And this being so, what more probable than that the General, whom I was prepared to credit with any atrocity, should take instant steps to possess himself of the child?

My lady said and did all that was kind on the occasion; and for a few hours it occupied all our thoughts. At the end of that time, about sunset, Gen. Tzerclas rode to the door, and with him, to my surprise, the Waldgrave. They would see her, and detained her so long that when she sent for me on their departure, I was sore on Marie's account, and inclined to blame her as indifferent to our loss. But a single glance at her face put another color on the matter. I saw that something had occurred to excite and disturb her.

"Martin," she said earnestly, "I am going to employ you on an errand of importance. Listen to me and do not interrupt me. Gen. Tzerclas starts to-morrow with the larger part of his forces to intercept one of Wallenstein's convoys, which is expected to pass twelve leagues to the south of this. There will be sharp fighting, I am told. And my cousin, the Waldgrave Rupert, is going. He is not at present—I mean, I am afraid he may do something rash. He is young," my lady continued with dignity and a heightened color, "and I wish he would stay here. But he will not."

I guessed at once that this affair of the convoy was the business which had brought Count Hugo to the camp. And I was beginning to consider what advantage we might make of it, and whether the General's absence might not afford us both a pretext for departure and the opportunity, when my lady's next words dispelled my visions.

"I want you," she said slowly, "to go with him. He has a high opinion of you, and will listen to you."

"The General?" I cried in amazement.

"Who spoke of him?" she exclaimed angrily. "I said the Waldgrave Rupert. I wish you to go with him to see that he does not run—any unnecessary risk."

I coughed dryly, and stood silent.

"Well?" my lady said with a frown. "Do you understand?"

"I understand, my lady" I answered firmly; "but I cannot go."

"You cannot go! when I send you!" she murmured, unable I think, to believe her ears. "Why, not, sirrah? Why not, if you please?"

"Because my first duty is to your Excellency," I stammered. "And as long as you are here I dare not—and will not leave you!"

"As long as I am here!" she retorted, red with anger and surprise. "You have still that maggot in your head, then? By my soul, Master Martin, if we were at home I would find means to drive it out! But I know what it is! What you really want is to stay by the side of that puling girl! Oh, I am not blind," my lady continued viciously, seeing that she had found at last the way to hurt me. "I know what has been going on."

"But Count Leuchtenstein——" I muttered.

"Don't bring him in!" my lady cried, in such a voice I dared go no further. "Gen. Tzerclas has told me of him. I understand what is between them, and you do not. Presumptuous booby!" she continued, flashing at me a glance of scorn, which made me tremble. "But I will thwart you! I have a way to do it. Since you will not leave me, I will go myself. I will go, but Mistress Marie shall stay here till we return."

"If there is to be fighting, my lady?" I said humbly.

"Ah! So you have changed your note, have you!" she cried triumphantly. I had seldom seen her more moved. "If there is to be fighting—she mocked my tone. Well, there is to be, but I shall go for all that. And now do you leave all ready for a start at daybreak, or it will be the worse for you! My woman will accompany me. Fräulein Anna will stay here with your—other mistress!"

She pointed to the door as she spoke, and once more charged me to be ready, and I went forth dazed. Everything had come on so sudden to be turned upside down—the child lost, my lady offended, the Waldgrave desperate, the General in favor. I could not see which way my duty lay. I would fain have stayed in the camp a day to make further search for the child, but I must go. I would gladly have got rid of the camp, but we were to travel in the General's company. As to leaving Marie, my lady wronged me. I knew of no danger which threatened the girl, nor any reason why she should not be safe where she was. If the child were found she would be here to receive it.

On the other hand, there was the discovery of the afternoon, from the immediate consequences of which Count Hugo's arrival had saved me. This sudden expedition should favor me there; the General would have his hands full of other things, and Ludwig be hard put to it to gain his ear. I might now, if I pleased, discover the matter to my lady, and open her eyes. But I had no proof. Even if time permitted, and I could take the Countess to that part of the camp, I could not be sure that the body was still there. And to accuse Gen. Tzerclas of such a thing without proof would be to court a fall.

While I was puzzling over this, I saw the Waldgrave outside, and, thinking to profit by his advice, went to meet him. But I found him in a peculiar mood, talking, laughing, and breaking into snatches of song; and all with a wildness and abandon that frightened me while they puzzled me. He laughed at my doubts. Walking up and down, while his servants scoured his breastpiece and cleaned his harness by the light of a lantern, he persisted in talking of nothing but the expedition before us and the pleasure of striking a blow or two.

"We are rusting, man!" he cried feverishly, clapping me on the back. "You have the rust on you yet, Martin. But—

Clink, clink, clink!
Sword and stirrup and spur!
Ride, ride, ride,
Heart and hand for fur!

To-morrow or next day we will have it off."

"You have heard about the child, my lord," I said, trying to bring him back to the present.

"I have heard that Von Werder, the dullest man at a board I ever met, turns out to be Hugo of Leuchtenstein, whom God preserve! he answered recklessly. "And that your girl's brat of a brother turns out to be his brat! And no sooner is the father found than the son is lost; and that both have gone as mysteriously as they came. But Himmel! man, what's the odds when we are going to fight to-morrow! What compares with that? Ca! ca! steady and the point!"

I thought of Marie; and it seemed to me that there were other things in the world besides fighting. For love makes a man both brave and a coward. But the argument would scarcely have been to the Waldgrave's mind, and, seeing that he would neither talk nor hear reason, I left him and went away to make my preparations.

On the road the next day I noticed that he was as dull as he had been gay, though every now and then he still flashed into the same wild merriment. Our party rode at the head of the column, that we might escape the dust and have the best of the road, the General and his principal officers accompanying us and leaving the guidance of the march to inferiors. Our force consisted of about 600 horse and 400 foot; and as we were to return to the camp we took with us neither sutlers nor ordinary baggage. Camp followers were interdicted under pain of death. Still the amount of our impedimenta astonished me. Half a dozen sumpter horses were needed to carry the General's tent and equipage; his officers required a score more. The ammunition for the foot soldiers, who were sufficiently burdened with their heavy matlocks, provided further loads; and in fine, while supposed to be marching in light fighting order, we had something like 100 packhorses in our train. Then there were men to lead them, and cooks and pages and foot boys and the General's band, and but that our way lay through woodland tracks and by-routes I verily believe we should have had his coach and dwarf also.

The sight of all these men and horses in motion was so novel and exhilarating, and the morning air so brisk, that I soon recovered from my parting with Marie and began to take a more cheerful view of the position. I came near to sympathizing with my lady, whose pleasure and delight knew no bounds. The long lines of horsemen winding through the wood, the trailing pikes and gaying pennons gratified her natural taste for war; while, as our march lay through the forest, she was shocked by none of those traces of its ravages which had appalled us on first leaving Heritzburg. The General waited on her with the utmost attention, riding by her bridle rein and talking with her by the hour together. Whenever I looked at them I noticed that her eye was bright and her color high, and I guessed that he was unfolding the plan of ambition which he was sure he masked under a cold and reserved demeanor. Alas! I could think of nothing more likely to take my lady's fancy, no course more sure to enlist her sympathy and interest. But I was helpless; I could do nothing. And for the Waldgrave, if he still had any power he would not use it.

My lady gave him opportunities. Several times I saw her try to draw him into conversation, and whenever Gen. Tzerclas left her for a while she turned to the younger man and would have talked to him. But he seemed unable to respond. When he was not moody gay he rode musing for a minute, a second half sullen, half afraid; and she presently gave him up, but not before her efforts had caught Tzerclas's eye. The General had been called for some purpose to the rear of the column, and on his return found the two talking, my lady's attitude such that he was forced at first to speak to the third. He did not try to resume his place, but fell in behind them; and riding so, almost if not quite within earshot, cast such ugly glances at them as more than confirmed me in the belief that in his own secret way he loved my mistress, and after a more dangerous fashion than the Waldgrave.

That was late in the afternoon, and another hour brought us who marched at the head of the column to our camping ground for the night. This lay in a rugged, wooded valley, not very commodious, but chosen because a high ridge only divided it from a second valley into which the main road and the river had their course. Our instructions were that the convoy, which was bound for Wallenstein's army then marching on Nuremburg, would pass through this second valley some time the following day. But until the hour came for making the proper dispositions, all precautions against our force were forbidden to mount the intervening ridge under pain of death. We had even to do without fires lest the smoke should betray our presence. For this one night we lay under something like the strict discipline which I had expected to find prevailing in a military camp. The only fire that was permitted cooked the General's meal, which he shared with my lady and the Waldgrave and the principal officers.

Even so the order caused trouble. The pikemen and musketeers did not come in till an hour before midnight, when they trudged into camp in great disorder and murmuring at their leaders. When they learned that fires were not to be lighted, disgust grew rapidly into open disobedience. On a sudden, in half a dozen quarters at once, flames flickered up, and the camp, dark before, became peopled in a moment with strange forms, whose eighteen-foot spears and cumbrous headpieces flung long shadows across the valley.

We had lain down to rest, but at the sound of the altercation and the various cries of "Pikes! Pikes!" and "Mutiny!" which broke out we came out of our lairs in the bracken to learn what was amiss. Calling my young Jacob and three or four of the Heritzburg men to my side, I ran to my lady to see that nothing befel her in the confusion. The noise had roused her, and we found her at the door of her tent looking out. The newly kindled fires, flaming and crackling on the sloping sides of the valley, lit up a strange scene of disorder—of hurrying men and plunging horses, for the alarm had extended to the horse lines—and for a moment I thought that the mutiny might spread and cut the knot of our difficulties or whelm us all in one ruin.

I had scarcely conceived this thought, when I saw that danger had passed out of our way, from his tent, whence he had just been called, and at the sight my new-born hopes vanished. He was bareheaded. He carried no arms, and had nothing in his hand but a riding switch. But the stern, grim aspect of face, in which was no mercy and no quailing, was worth a thousand pikes. The light had gone on his pale, olive cheek and brooding eyes as he went by us, not seeing us, and after that I did not doubt what would happen, though for a moment the tumult of oaths and cries seemed to swell rather than sink, and I saw more than one pale-lipped officer climb into the saddle that he might be able to fly if necessary.

The issue agreed with my expectations. The heart of the disorder lay in a part of the camp separated from our quarters by a brook, but near enough in point of distance, so that we saw, my lady and all, pretty clearly what followed. For a few minutes, a few seconds, during which you could hear a pin drop through the camp, the General stood, his life in the balance, unarmed in the midst of armed men. But he had that set courage which seems to daunt the common sort and paralyze the finger on the trigger; and he prevailed. The knaves lowered their weapons and shrank back cowering before him. In a twinkling the fires were beaten out by a hundred eager feet, and the General strode back to us through the silent, obsequious camp.

He distinguished my lady standing at the door of her tent, and stepped aside. "I am sorry you have been disturbed, Countess," he said politely. "It shall not occur again. I will hang up a dozen of those hounds to-morrow, and we shall have less barking."

"You are not hurt?" my lady asked, in a voice unlike her own voice.

He laughed, deigning no answer in words. Then he said: "You have no fire? Camp rules, of course, are not for you. Pray have one lit." And he passed on to his tent.

I had the curiosity to go by it when my lady retired. I found a dozen men, cuirassiers of his own privileged company, peeping and squinting under the canvas which had been hung round his fire. I joined them and looked, and saw him lying at length, wrapped in his cloak, reading "Cesar's Campaigns" by the light of the blaze as if nothing had happened.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN A GREEN VALLEY.

"He was as good as his word. Before the sun had been up an hour next day six of the mutineers, chosen by lot from a hundred of the more guilty, dangled from a great tree which overhung the brook, and were already forgotten—so short are soldiers' memories—in the hurry and bustle of a new undertaking. The bodies were still swinging when news from the neighboring valley was soon dotted with parties of men making their war up it, through bracken and furze which reached nearly to the waist, while the horse under Count Waska rode slowly off to make the circuit of the hill and enter the next valley by an easier road.

My lady chose to climb the hill on foot, in the track of the pikemen, though the heavy dew, which the sun had not yet drunk up, soon drenched her skirts, and she might, had she willed it, have been carried to the top on men's shoulders. The fern and long grass clasped her, and made our progress slow, so that the General's dispositions were in great part made when we reached the summit. Busy as he still was, however, he had eyes for us. He came at once and placed us in a small copse of fir trees, that crowned one of the knobs of the ridge. From this point, where he took up his own position, we could command, ourselves unseen, the whole valley, the road, and river—the scene of the coming surprise—and see clearly, what no one below could discern, where our footmen lay in ambush in parties of fifty; the mounted men among some black thorns, close to the north end of the valley; and musketmen a little further within and almost immediately below us. The latter, prone in the fern, looked, viewed from above, like lines of sheep feeding, until the light gleamed on a gun barrel or sword hilt and dispelled the peaceful illusion.

The sun had not yet risen above the hill on which we stood, and the valley below us lay cool and green and very pleasant to the eye. About a league in length, it was nowhere, except at its southern extremity, where it widened into a small plain, more than half a mile wide, hemmed in between such borders of pikes and musketeers. The road, below us, and a little to the right, it diminished to a mere wooded defile, through which the river ran over rocks and boulders, with a dull roar which came plainly to our ears. A solitary house of some size, with two or three hovels clustered about it, stood near the middle of the valley; but not a wisp of smoke rose from the chimney, no cock crowed, no dog barged. And, looking more closely, I saw that the place was deserted.

So quiet it seemed in this peaceful Thuringian valley, I shuddered when I thought of the purpose which brought us here. And I saw my lady's face grow sad with a like reflection. But Gen. Tzerclas viewed all with another mind. The stillness, the sunshine, the very song of the lark, as it rose up and up and up above us, and, still unwearied, sang its song of praise, touched no chord in his breast. The quietude pleased him, but only because it favored his plans; the lark's hymn, because it covered with a fair mask his lurking ambush; the sunshine, because it seemed a good augury. His keen and vigilant eye the smile which curled his lip, the set expression of his face, showed that he saw before him a battlefield and no more; a step upward—a triumph, a victory, and that was all.

I blame him then. I confess now I misjudged him. He who leads on such occasions risks more than his life, and bears a weight of responsibility that may well crush from his mind all moods or thoughts of weather. At least I did him, I had to do him, this justice—that he betrayed no anxiety, uttered no word of doubt or misgiving. Standing with his back against a tree and his eyes on the northern pass, he remained placidly silent, or talked at his ease. In this he contrasted well with the Waldgrave, who paced up and down in the background, as if the fir grove were a prison and he a captive waiting to be freed.

"At what hour should they be here?" my lady asked presently, breaking a long silence.

She tried to speak in her ordinary tone, but her voice sounded uncertain. A woman, however brave, is a woman still. It began to dawn upon her that things were going to happen which it might be unpleasant to see and scarcely less unpleasant to remember.

"I am afraid I cannot say," the General answered lightly. "I have done my part; I am here. Between this and night they should be here too."

"Unless they have been warned," the Countess said.

"Presently," he answered—"unless they have been warned."

After that my lady composed herself anew, and the day wore on in desultory conversation and a grim kind of picnic. Noon came, and afternoon, and the Countess grew nervous and irritable. But Gen. Tzerclas, though the hours as they passed without event, without bringing that for which he waited, must have tried him severely, showed to advantage throughout. He was ready to talk, satisfied to be silent. Late in the day, when my lady, drowsy with the heat, dozed a little, he brought out his Cesar and read in it, as if nothing depended on the day, and he were the most indifferent of spectators. She awoke and found him reading, and, for a time, sat staring at him, wondering where she was. At last she remembered. She sat up with a start and gazed at her watch.

"Are we still waiting?" she said.

"We are still waiting," he answered, closing his book with a smile. "But," he continued, a moment later, "I trust I hear something now. Keep back a little, if you please, Countess."

We all stood up among the trees, listening, and presently, though the murmuring of the river in the pass prevented us hearing duller sounds, a sharp noise, often repeated, came to our ears. It resembled the snapping of sticks under foot.

"Stand fast!" Gen. Tzerclas muttered. "Stand back, if you please."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth before a handful of horsemen appeared on a sudden in the road below us. They came on like tired men, some with their feet dangling, some sitting sideways on their horses. Many had kerchiefs wound round their head, all carried their steel caps at the saddle bow; others nodded in their seats, as if asleep. They were abreast of the pikemen when we first saw them, and we watched them advance until a couple of hundred yards brought them into line with the musketmen. These, too, they passed without suspicion, and we went jolting and clinking on down the valley, every man with a bundle on his crupper, and strange odds and ends banging and swinging against his horse's sides.

Two hundred paces behind them the first wagons appeared, dragged slowly on by yoke labouring horses, and guarded by a dozen foot soldiers—heavy-browed fellows, lounging along beside the wheels, with their hands in breeches pockets. Their long, trailing weapons they had tied at the tail of the wagon. Close on their heels, creaking and groaning, came another wagon, and another, and another, with a drowsy, stumbling train of teamsters and horse boys, and here and there an officer or a knot of men at arms. The foot soldiers had mostly climbed up into the wagons, and lay sprawling on the loads with their arms thrown wide, and their heads rolling from side to side with each movement of the straining team.

We watched eighty of these wagons go by; the first must have been a mile and more in front of the last. After them followed a disorderly band of stragglers, among whom were some women. Then a thick, solid cloud of dust, far exceeding all that had gone before, came down the pass. It advanced by fits and starts, now plunging forward, now halting, while the heart of it gave forth a dull roaring sound that rose above the murmur of the river.

"Cattle!" Gen. Tzerclas muttered. "Five hundred head, I should say. There can be nothing behind that. Steady, trumpeter."

The man he addressed stood a few paces behind us; and at intervals along the ridge others lay hidden, ready to pass the signal to an officer stationed on the furthest knob, who as soon as he heard the call would spring up, and with a flag pass the order to the cavalry below.

The suspense, the moments that such it seemed in age before the General gave the word. He stood and appeared to calculate, now looking keenly toward the head of the convoy, which was fast disappearing in a haze of dust, now gazing down at the bellowing, struggling, wavering mass below us. At length, when the cattle had all but cleared the pass, he raised his hand and cried sharply:

"Now!"

The harsh blare of the trumpet pierced the upper stillness in which we stood. It was repeated—repeated again; then it died away shrilly in the distance. The Waldgrave's clamor on the instant filled the valley below us. We pressed forward to see what was happening.

The surprise was complete, and yet it was a sorry sight we saw down in the bottom, where the sunshine was dying, and guns were flashing, and men were chasing one another in the grey evening light. Our musketmen, going out of ambush, had shot down the horses of the last half-dozen wagons, and, when we looked, were falling pell-mell upon the unlucky troop of stragglers who followed the wagons. These flying all ways, filled the air with horrid screams. Further to the rear our pikemen had surrounded the pass, and, penning the cattle into it, rendered escape by that road hopeless. Forward, however, despite the confusion and dismay, things were different. Our cavalry did not appear—the dust prevented us seeing what they were doing. And here the enemy had a moment's respite, a moment in which to think, to fly, or stand on their defence.

Very soon, while we looked on breathless, it was evident that they were taking advantage of it. Possibly the General had not counted on the dust or the lateness of the hour. He began to gaze forward toward the head of the column, and to make his angry at the footmen below, as who seemed more eager to overtake the fugitives and strip the dead than to press forward and break down opposition. He sent down Ludwig with orders; then another.

But the mischief was done already, and still the cavalry did not appear, being delayed, as we afterwards learned, by an unforeseen hitch. Some one with a head on his shoulders had quickly drawn together all those among the enemy who could fight or had a mind to fight. Two wagons were driven out of the line, and in a moment overturned; and in a twinkling the panic-stricken troopers and teamsters had a breastwork behind which to stand at bay.

Its value was soon proved. A company of our musketeers, following some stragglers through the medley of flying horses and maddened cattle which covered the ground near the pass, came upon this rude fortress, and charged into it recklessly or in ignorance, in a moment or a volley from the wagon laid half a dozen on the ground. The rest fell back, and scattered hither and thither. They were scarcely dispersed before a handful of the enemy's officers and mounted men came riding back from the front. Stabling their horses in the intervals between the wagons, they took up what could still be seen exposing himself, mounted and bareheaded in the hottest of the fire, ordering, threatening, inciting, leading, so that we could almost hear his voice where we stood, was the Waldgrave! His blue velvet cloak and bright fair head were unmistakable, though darkness was fast closing over the fight, and it was only at intervals we could see anything through the pall of smoke.

"Vivat Weimar!" I cried involuntarily, a glow of warmth and pride coursing through my veins. In that moment I loved the young man as if he had been my son.

The next I fell from the clouds. What would my lady say if anything happened to him? What should I say if I stood by now and saw him fall? And he with no headpiece, breast, or back. It was madness of him to expose himself so! I started forward, stung by the thought, and before I knew what I was doing—for, in fact, I could have done no good—I was on the slope and descending the hill. Almost at the same moment the General gave the word to those who remained with him, and began to descend also. The hill was steep there, and it took us five minutes to reach the scene of action.

If I had foolishly thought I could do anything, I was disappointed. By that time the battle was over. Manning every wagon within range, and pouring in a steady fire, our sharpshooters had quickly thinned the ranks behind the barricade. The enemy's fire had first slackened, and then ceased. A little later, one wing, unable to bear the shower of shot, had broken and tried to fly, and in a moment our pikemen had gained the work.

We heard the flight and pursuit go wailing up the valley, but the disorder, and darkness, and noise at the foot of the hill where we found ourselves, were such that I stood scared and bewildered, uncertain which way to turn or whither to go. On every side of me men were stripping the dead, the wounded were crying for water, and cattle and horses, wounded or maddened, were rushing up and down among broken wagons and prostrate loads. Such eyes of cruelty and greed glared at me across dead men that I drew my sword and carried it drawn. The scene had robbed me of half my faculties; I did not know which way to turn; and until I came upon Ludwig I wandered aimlessly about, looking for the Waldgrave, without plan or system. It was my first experience of the darker side of war, and in horror it surpassed anything I had imagined or thought possible.

Ludwig, badly wounded in the leg, I found under a wagon. I had stood close beside him for some time without seeing him, and he had not spoken. But when I moved away I suppose he recognized my figure or step, for even I had gone a few paces I heard a hoarse voice calling my name. I went cautiously back to the wagon, and after a moment's search detected him peering from under it with a white, fierce face, which somehow reminded me of a savage creature at bay.

"Hallo!" I said. "Why did you not speak before, man?"

"Get me some water," he whispered painfully. "Water, for the love of heaven!"

I told him I had no flask or bottle, or I should before this have fetched some for others. He gave me his, and I was starting off when I remembered that he might know how the Waldgrave had fared. So I asked him.

"He led the pursuit," he muttered. "He is all right." Then, as I was again turning, he clutched my arm and continued. "Have you a pistol?"

"Yes," I said. "Why?"

"Lend it me until you come back," he gasped. "If these vultures find me they will finish me. I know them. That is better. I shall win through yet."

I marked where his wagon stood, and left him. The river was less than a quarter of a mile away, but it lay low, and the banks were steep; and in the darkness it was not easy to find a way down to the water. Succeeding at last—and how still and peaceful it seemed as I bent over the gently flowing surface and heard the plash and gurgle of the willows in the stream!—I filled my bottle and climbed back to the plain level. Here I found a change. At intervals up and down the valley great fires had been kindled. Some of them, burning high already, lit up the wretched huts of the dark groups moving round it, and even threw a red, uncertain glare far up the slopes of the hills. Aided by the light, I hastened back, and finding Ludwig without much difficulty, held the bottle to his lips. He seemed nearly gone, but the draught revived him marvellously.

When he had drunk I asked him if I could do anything else for him. He looked already more like himself.

"Yes," he said, propping his back against the wheel and speaking with his usual hardihood. "Tell your little General where I am. That is all. I shall do now we have light. I am not afraid of these skulkers any longer. But here, friend Martin. You asked about your Waldgrave just now?"

"Yes," I said. "Has he returned?"

"He never went," he replied coolly. "But if I had told you when you first asked me, you would not have gone for water for me. He is down. He fell, as nearly as I can remember, on the further side of the second fire from here."

With a curse I ran from him raging, and searched round that fire and the next, like one beside himself. Many of the dead lay stripped to the skin already, so that it was necessary to examine faces. And this ghastly task, performed with trembling fingers and by an uncertain light, was made more dreadful by men prowling about with knives and bundles, whom I more than once interrupted in their work; but the sight of my pistol, and perhaps of my face—for I was full of fierce loathing and would have shot them like rats—drove them off wherever I came. Not once but many times the wounded, and dying begged me to stay by them and protect them; but my water was at an end and my time was not my own. I ran from place to place in a fever of dread which allowed of no rest or relaxation. At last, when I had well nigh given up hope, I found him lying half stripped among a heap of dead and wounded, at the furthest corner of the barricade.

All his finery was gone, and his handsome face and fair hair were stained and bedabbled with dust and blood. But he was not dead. I could feel his heart beating faintly in his breast; and though he lay senseless and showed no other signs of life, I was thankful to find hope remained. I borrowed a lantern presently, and laid my man down by himself and moistened his lips with the drainings of my flask. But what next? I could not leave him. The plunderers who had already robbed him might return at any moment. And yet, without cordials and coverings and many things I had not, the poor wretch I felt sure, must go out. I stood up and looked round in despair. A lurid glare, a pitiful wailing, a passing of dark figures filled the valley. A hundred round us needed help; a hundred were beyond help. There were none to give it.

I was about to raise him in my arms and carry him in search of help, for I feared the effect of the motion on his wounds, when to my joy and relief the measured tramp of footsteps broke on my ears, and I distinguished with delight a party of men approaching with torches. A few mounted officers followed them, and two wagons creaked slowly behind. They were collecting the wounded.

I ran to meet them. "Quick!" I cried breathlessly. "This way."

"Not so fast!" a harsh voice interposed, and, looking up, I saw that the General himself was directing the party. "Not so fast, my friend," he repeated. "Who is it?" and leaning forward in his saddle he looked down at me.

"The Waldgrave Rupert," I answered impatiently. "He is hurt almost to death. But he is alive, and may live, your Excellency. Only direct them to come quickly."

Sitting on his horse in the full glare of the torches, he gazed down at me, and his face wore a strange expression of hesitation. "He is alive?" he said at last.

"Yes, at present. But he will soon be dead if we do not go to him," I retorted. "This way! lie lies yonder."

"Lead on!" the General curtly said.

I obeyed. A moment brought our party to the spot. The Waldgrave still lay insensible, his face pale and drawn, his eyes half open and disclosing the whites. Under the glare of the torches he looked so like a corpse and so far beyond aid that it was not until I had again thrust my hand into his breast, in desperate fear, and felt the movement of his heart, that I was reassured.

As for the General, after looking down at him for a while, he said quietly, "He is dead."

"Not so, your Excellency," I answered, rising briskly from my knees. "He is stunned. That is all."

"He is dead," the General persisted coldly. "Leave him. We must help those first who need help."

They were actually turning away! Then had moved a couple of paces before I could believe it! Then I sprang to the General's rein.

"You mistake, your Excellency," I cried, my voice shrill with excitement. "In heaven's name, stop! He is alive! I can feel his breathing. I swear he is alive!" I added, trembling with emotion and terror.

"He is dead!" he said harshly. "Stand back!"

Then I understood. In a flash his wicked purpose lay bared before me. I knew he was playing with me; I read in the cold, derisive menace of his eye that he knew the Waldgrave lived, that he knew he might live, might survive, might see the dawn, and that he was resolved he should not. The perspiration sprang out on my brow. I choked with indignation.

"Mein Gott!" I cried breathless, "and but for him you would have been beaten."

"Stand back!" he muttered through his closed teeth; and his eyes glittered with rage. "Are you weary of your life, man?"

"Ay, if you live!" I reared, and I shook his rein as that his horse reared and almost unseated him. But still I clung to it. "Come back! Come back!" I cried, mad with passion, wild with indignation at treachery so vile and cold-blooded. "Or I will leave you from your horse, you villain! I will——"

I stumbled as I spoke over a broken shaft of a wagon. In a moment half a dozen strong arms closed round me. I was down and up again. I fought savagely, passionately, at the last desperately, having that cold, sneering face before me, and knowing it was for my life. But they were many to one. They crushed me down and kept me down, and presently I lay panting and quiet. One of the men who held me had unsheathed his dagger and stood looking to the General for a signal. I closed my eyes expecting the stroke, and involuntarily drew in my breast as if that poor effort might avert the stroke.

But the General did not give the signal. He sat gazing down at me with a ruthless smile on his face. "Tie him up," he said slowly, when he had enjoyed his triumph to the full. "Tie him up securely. When we get back to the camp we will have a shooting match, and he shall find us in sport. You knave!" he continued, riding up to me in a paroxysm of anger, and slashing me across the face with his riding whip so cruelly that the flesh rose in great wales, and I fell back into the men's arms blind and shuddering with pain. "I have had my eye on you! But you will work me no more mischief. Throw him in the wagon there," he continued. "Tie up his mouth if he makes a noise. Has any one seen Ludwig?"

(To be continued.)

THE DOCTORS OF HOYLAND.

BY A. CONAN DOYLE.

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Dr. James Ripley was always looked upon as an exceedingly lucky dog by all of the profession who knew him. His father had preceded him in a practice in the village of Hoyland, in the north of Hampshire, and all was ready for him on the very first day that the law allowed him to put his name at the foot of a prescription. In a few years the old gentleman retired and settled on the South Coast, leaving his son in undisputed possession of the whole country side. Save for Dr. Horton, near Basingstoke, the young surgeon had a clear run of six miles in every direction and took his £1,500 a year, though, as is usual in country practices, the stable swallowed up most of what the consulting room earned.

Dr. James Ripley was two-and-thirty years of age, reserved, learned, unmarried, with set rather stern features, and a thinning of the dark hair upon the top of his head, which was worth quite a hundred a year to him. He was particularly happy in his management of ladies. He had caught the tone of bland sternness and decisive suavity which dominates without offending. Ladies, however, were not equally happy in their management of him. Professionally, he was always at their service. Socially, he was a drop of quicksilver. In vain the country mammas spread out their simple lures in front of him. Dances and picnics were not to his taste, and he preferred during his scanty leisure to shut himself up in his study, and to bury himself in Virchow's Archives and the professional journals.

Study was a passion with him, and he would have none of the rust which often gathers round a country practitioner. It was his ambition to keep his knowledge as fresh and bright as at the moment when he had stepped out of the examination hall. He prided himself on being able at a moment's notice to rattle off the seven ramifications of some obscure artery, or to give the exact percentage of any physiological compound. After a long day's work he would sit up half the night performing iridectomies and extractions upon the sheep's eyes sent in by the village butcher, to the horror of his housekeeper, who had to remove the débris next morning. His love for his work was the one fanaticism which found a place in his dry, precise nature.

It was the more to his credit that he should keep up to date in his knowledge, since he had no competition to force him to exertion. In the seven years during which he had practised in Hoyland three rivals had pitted themselves against him, two in the village itself and one in the neighboring hamlet of Lower Hoyland. Of these one had sickened and wasted, being, as it was said, himself the only patient whom he had treated during his eighteen months of ruralizing. A second had bought a fourth share of a Basingstoke practice and had departed honorably, while a third had vanished one September night, leaving a gutted house and an unpaid drug bill behind him. Since then the district had become a monopoly, and no one had dared to measure himself against the established fame of the Hoyland doctor.

It was, then, with a feeling of some surprise and considerable curiosity that on driving through Lower Hoyland one morning he perceived that the new house at the end of the village was occupied, and that a virgin brass plate glistened upon the swinging gate which faced the high road. He pulled up his fifty-guinea chestnut mare, and took a good look at it. "Verrinder Smith, M. D.," was printed across it in very neat, small lettering. The last man had had letters half a foot long, with a lamp like a fire station. Dr James Ripley noted the difference, and deduced from it that the newcomer might possibly prove a more formidable opponent. He was convinced of it that evening when he came to consult the current medical directory. By it he learned that Dr. Verrinder Smith was the holder of superb degrees, that he had studied with distinction at Edinburgh, Paris, Berlin, and Vienna, and, finally, that he had been awarded a gold medal and the Lee Hopkins scholarship for original research in recognition of an exhaustive inquiry into the functions of the anterior spinal nerve roots. Dr. Ripley passed his fingers through his thin hair in bewilderment as he read his rival's record. What on earth could so brilliant a man mean by putting up his plate in a little Hampshire hamlet?

But Dr. Ripley furnished himself with an explanation to the riddle. No doubt Dr. Verrinder Smith had simply come down there in order to pursue some scientific research in peace and quiet. The plate was up as an address rather than as an invitation to patients. Of course, that must be the true explanation. In that case the presence of this brilliant neighbor would be a splendid thing for his own studies. He had often longed for some kindred mind, some steel on which he might strike his flint. Chance had brought it to him, and he rejoiced exceedingly.

And this joy it was which led him to take a step which was quite at variance with his usual habits. It is the custom for a newcomer among medical men to call first upon the older, and the etiquette upon the subject is strict. Dr. Ripley was pedantically exact on such points, and yet he deliberately drove over next day and called upon Dr. Verrinder Smith. Such a waiving of ceremony was, he felt, a gracious act upon his part, and a fit prelude to the intimate relations which he hoped to establish with his neighbor.

The house was neat and well appointed, and Dr. Ripley was shown by a smart maid into a dapper little consulting room. As he passed in he noticed two or three parasols and a lady's sun bonnet hanging in the hall. It was a pity that his colleague should be a married man. It would put them upon a different footing, and interfere with those long evenings of high scientific talk which he had pictured to himself. On the other hand, there was much in the consulting room to please him. Elaborate instruments, seen more often in hospitals than in the houses of private practitioners, were scattered about. A sphygmograph stood upon the table, and a gasometer-like engine, which was new to Dr. Ripley, in the corner. A bookcase full of ponderous volumes in French and German, paper-covered for the most part, and varying in tint from the shell to the yolk of a duck's egg, caught his wandering eyes, and he was deeply absorbed in their titles when the door opened suddenly behind him. Turning round he found himself facing a little woman, whose plain, pallish face was remarkable only for a pair of shrewd, humorous eyes of a blue which had two shades too much green in it. She held a *pince-nez* in her left hand and the Doctor's card in her right.

"How do you do, Dr. Ripley?" said she.

"How do you do, madam?" returned the visitor. "Your husband is perhaps out?"

"I am not married," said she, simply

"Oh, I beg your pardon! I meant the Doctor—Dr. Verrinder Smith."

"I am Dr. Verrinder Smith."

Dr. Ripley was so surprised that he dropped his hat and forgot to pick it up again.

"What!" he gasped, "the Lee Hopkins prize man! You!" He had never seen a woman doctor before, and his whole conservative soul rose up in revolt at the idea. He could not recall any Biblical injunction that the man should remain ever the doctor and the woman the nurse, and yet he felt as if a blasphemy had been committed. His face betrayed his feelings only too clearly.

"I am sorry to disappoint you," said the lady dryly.

"You certainly have surprised me," he answered, picking up his hat.

"You are not among our champions then?"

"I cannot say that I am among the happy ones."

"And why?"

"I should much prefer not to discuss it."

"But I am sure you will answer a lady's question."

"Ladies are in danger of losing their privileges when they usurp the place of the other sex. They cannot claim both."

"Why should a woman not earn her bread by her brains?"

Dr. Ripley felt irritated by the quiet manner in which the lady cross-questioned him.

"I should much prefer not to be led into a discussion, Miss Smith."

"Dr. Smith," she interrupted.

"Well, Dr. Smith! But if you insist upon an answer I must say that I do not think medicine a suitable profession for women, and that I have a personal objection to masculine ladies." It was an exceedingly rude speech and he was ashamed of it the instant after he had made it. The lady, however, simply raised her eyebrows and smiled.

"It seems to me that you are begging the question," said she. "Of course, if it makes women masculine that would be a considerable deterioration."

It was a neat little counter, and Dr. Ripley, like a pinked fencer, bowed his acknowledgment. "I must go," said he.

"I am sorry that we cannot come to some more friendly conclusion, since we are to be neighbors," she remarked.

He bowed again, and took a step toward the door.

"It was a singular coincidence," she continued, "that at the instant that you called I was reading your paper on 'Locomotor Ataxia' in the *Lancet*."

"Indeed!" said he dryly.

"I thought it was a very able monograph."

"You are very good."

"But the views which you attribute to Prof. Pitres of Bordeaux have been repudiated by him."

"I have his pamphlet of 1890," said Dr. Ripley angrily.

"Here is his pamphlet of 1891." She picked it from among a litter of periodicals. "If you have time to glance your eye down this passage——"

Dr. Ripley took it from her and shot rapidly through the paragraph which she indicated. There was no denying that it completely knocked the bottom out of his own article. He threw it down, and with another frigid bow he made for the door. As he took the reins from his groom he glanced round and saw that the lady was standing at her window, and it seemed to him that she was laughing heartily.

All day the memory of this interview haunted him. He felt that he had come very badly out of it. She had shown herself to be his superior on his own pet subject. She had been courteous while he had been rude, self-possessed when he had been angry. And then, above all, there was her presence, her monstrous intrusion, to rankle in his mind. A woman doctor had been an abstract thing before, repugnant, but distant. Now she was there in actual practice, with a